

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): School management and Staff during COVID-19 pandemic

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is intended for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) maintained schools. It is provided as advice for schools where the Governors are the employer. Academies may adapt these guidelines should they wish to. Any latest additions have been marked in blue font.

We have collated this document to help answer some general and HR related questions in accordance with the national guidance released during Covid-19. *Please be mindful that this document stands correct as of 29th December 2020. As the national guidelines are constantly emerging, please be mindful that this FAQ may not reflect any updates arising from the national guidelines in real time.*

Please refer to this [link](#) for the most update information from the Government.

If your question has not been answered here, please contact-
EPS Helpdesk: 023 8038 3500 / eps.consultants@hants.gov.uk
OCC HR: hradvisedesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk

What tier alert level is in place in Oxfordshire and what does this mean?

Oxfordshire is in Tier 4 with effect from 26th December. The government's adjustment of the COVID-19 alert system will still classify different parts of the country based on their numbers of infection and overall risk level. The tiers (medium, high, very high and stay at home) are in place to prevent a return to growing infections, with the toughest measures being targeted to those parts of the country where the virus is most prevalent or where there are sharper increases in the rate of infection. Details of the new restrictions can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#).

Further information including restrictions in place in Oxfordshire can be found on [our website](#).

Section 1: Supporting staff

Q1.1 Is there any general advice for Headteachers in terms of action I should take to support my staff at this time?

Headteachers are requested to:

- Keep themselves well-informed by checking for the latest updates regarding COVID-19 on [Government website](#) and [NHS website](#).
- Strictly adhere to, and circulate the advice being issued;
- Encourage staff in your teams to use anti-virus cleansing wipes to ensure surfaces and workstations are cleaned before and after use;
- Emphasise good hand hygiene and hand-washing practices and to follow the 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' advice, and particularly for any staff with a cough or cold;
- Any cleaning activities should be undertaken with reference to Health and Safety guidance and be risk-assessed where necessary and appropriate;

Q1.2 What is the general advice for staff?

Following the Government advice, there is the need for individuals and their households to self-isolate if they have symptoms of the coronavirus infection. The symptoms are:

- a high temperature (i.e. 37.8 degrees or higher / you feel hot to touch on your chest or back)
- a new, continuous cough (this means you've started coughing repeatedly)

- loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

There are several other symptoms linked with COVID-19. These other symptoms may have another cause and are not on their own a reason to have a COVID-19 test. If you are concerned about your symptoms, seek medical advice.

If staff live alone and have symptoms of coronavirus illness (COVID 19), however, mild, they must stay at home for the full isolation period from when their symptoms started and arrange to have a test.

You will need to self-isolate for 10 days if:

- someone you live with has symptoms or tested positive
- someone in your support bubble has symptoms or tested positive
- you've been told by NHS Test and Trace that you've been in contact with someone who has coronavirus

Here is the link to the government advice- [link](#)

If you are concerned that they are not following current Government advice, please contact the Education Personnel Services at eps.consultants@hants.gov.uk for advice and support.

Q1.3 Can I get tested for COVID-19?

The Government's COVID-19 testing programme continues to develop. Arrangements are now in place across the county to test frontline staff who believe they may be displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

Online booking is available at <https://self-referral.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/>. Please be aware the website may experience very high volumes of traffic and may not be accepting bookings. If you are not able to book, please do check back later.

Q1.4 What kind of tests are available for COVID-19?

There are two types of test currently being used to detect if someone has COVID-19:

- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests
- Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests

PCR tests detect the RNA (ribonucleic acid, the genetic material) of a virus. PCR tests are the most reliable COVID-19 tests. It takes some time to get the results because they are usually processed in a laboratory.

LFD tests detect proteins in the coronavirus and work in a similar way to a pregnancy test. They are simple and quick to use. LFD tests are not as accurate as PCR tests and are mainly used in people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19.

Anyone who has a positive LFD test should have a PCR test to confirm the result within 48 hours, and self-isolate until the PCR test confirms them as negative.

Q1.5 Is there testing available for school staff on site? I have heard some people have been tested COVID positive although they were asymptomatic.

The Government has recently announced that secondary schools and colleges in England, as well as special schools and alternative provision, will have access to rapid coronavirus testing from January 2021, which aims to help detect asymptomatic cases and break chains of transmission. Staff will be tested weekly, and staff and students will be tested daily if identified as a close contact of a positive contact.

From January, those in the same bubble will not need to self-isolate if they agree to be tested once a day, which will help to improve attendance and face-to-face teaching.

Primary schools will be supported to roll out testing as quickly as possible over the spring term. [Guidance on asymptomatic testing in schools](#) and a handbook developed by NHS Test and Trace has also been produced.

We are still awaiting further clarity from the Government over the impact on school staff and the need for them to be trained to administer the testing, as well as the expected timescale to achieve this.

Following the announcement, this [site](#) has been set up to publish further support materials. Further details, and training materials, will be made available soon via this site. Schools can in the interim, [download a handbook](#) as the first of these materials.

Link to Government site for more information is- [here](#)

Q1.6 Following the new Government Restrictions published on 21st December regarding Tier 4, what are the changes for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable / shielding?

If you have a member of staff who lives in Tier 4 and were previously shielding (i.e. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable), they will receive a letter from the Government to confirm they are in the CEV / shielding group and advising them on the new restrictions. If you have a staff member who is in the CEV category and living in Tier 4, they are advised to work from home until further Government advice. Managers are advised to review staff's risk assessment and establish what alternative duties can they support the education setting in, whilst working from home.

If you are an OCC maintained school and have a clinically extremely vulnerable staff living in Tier 4, who cannot work from home, they should stay at home and will continue to be paid as normal until further changes in the Government advice.

Staff who are in the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable category are advised to stay at home except to go outdoors for exercise or to attend essential health appointments. They must notify their line manager and record this as isolation working, or isolation non-working as before. They will receive a letter from the NHS or Government confirming this and should provide a copy to their manager who will upload this onto the personnel file.

The new advice suggests that Clinically extremely vulnerable children living in Tier 4, should not attend education settings. Children and young people whose parents or carers are clinically extremely vulnerable can continue to go to school.

Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 can be found [here](#).

Q1.7 I have clinically extremely vulnerable staff who do not live in Tier 4. What is the advice for them?

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff member should not go to the workplace if they live or work in areas where shielding advice is active. Currently this applies to Tier 4 areas only. CEV staff members living or working in Tier 1, 2 and 3 can continue to attend work / work from home as per their current arrangements-there is no formal shielding advice in place for areas outside tier 4 currently.

The updated guidance can be found [here](#).

The government will be ensuring that support is available for those who need it, such as access to food and medicines and signposting to local support or befriending services, to enable people to stay at home as much as possible over this period. NHS Volunteer Responders can also help with a regular, friendly phone call, and transport to and from medical appointments.

The online service for registering for support can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support>

Q1.8 What classifies as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable group?

Those with the following conditions fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group:

- solid organ transplant recipients
- people with specific cancers
- people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
- people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
- people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- people having other targeted cancer treatments that can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- people with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- people with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell)
- people on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- adults with Down's syndrome
- adults on dialysis or with chronic kidney disease (Stage 5)
- women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired
- other people who have also been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, based on clinical judgement and an assessment of their needs. GPs and hospital clinicians have been provided with guidance to support these decisions

Q1.9 I have staff who are Clinically Vulnerable, what does that mean?

Clinically vulnerable people are those who are:

- are 70 or older
- have a lung condition that's not severe (such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis)
- have heart disease (such as heart failure)
- have diabetes
- have chronic kidney disease
- have liver disease (such as hepatitis)
- have a condition affecting the brain or nerves (such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy)
- have a condition that means they have a high risk of getting infections
- are taking medicine that can affect the immune system (such as low doses of steroids)
- are very obese (a BMI of 40 or above)
- are pregnant

There has been no change in the position regarding clinically vulnerable staff. It is important we protect staff at higher risk of coronavirus especially those who are in the vulnerable groups.

Clinically vulnerable individuals who are at higher risk of severe illness (for example, people with some pre-existing conditions, aged over 70, pregnant, BAME) have been asked to take extra care. They:

- should be especially careful to follow the rules and minimise contacts with others
- should continue to wash their hands carefully and more frequently than usual and maintain thorough cleaning of frequently touched areas in their home and/or workspace

If you have a member of staff who falls into the clinically vulnerable category, you as their line manager must review their individual risk assessment to ascertain if there has been a change in their health condition, role or responsibilities. If a risk assessment was completed for them around September-November, you do not need to review unless there has been a change in their circumstances. The member of staff can continue to work in the school setting with appropriate control measures in place e.g. PPE.

Q1.10 I have a staff member who lives with someone who has been identified as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, can that member of staff continue to attend work?

People in the same household living in Tier 4, who are not clinically extremely vulnerable should continue to attend work as current, if they are unable to work from home, and children and young people should continue to attend school in line with the new national restrictions.

Q1.11 Do I need to report for health and safety reasons when a member of staff contracts COVID-19 at work?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has introduced [new guidance](#) which requires employers to make a report under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (“RIDDOR”) of new cases of COVID-19.

The guidance requires a report to be made where either:

| | |
|---|---|
| Dangerous occurrence | An accident or incident at work has, or could have, led to the release of corona virus (SARS-CoV-2). |
| Work-related ill health and reportable diseases | a person at work (a worker) has been diagnosed as having COVID-19 attributed to an occupational exposure to coronavirus |
| Work-related ill health and reportable diseases | A worker dies as a result of occupational exposure to coronavirus. |

A diagnosis would generally be given if the employee is hospitalised and or as the result of a test for the virus.

Reasonable evidence would need to be established to support the likelihood of occupational exposure. The HSE gives the example “work-related exposure to coronavirus would be a health care professional who is diagnosed with COVID-19 after treating patients with COVID-19”.

For LA maintained schools only:

These reports can be submitted using the online [H&S Reporting System](#) using the relevant category in the table above.

The H&S Team will review these and arrange for the necessary RIDDOR report to be submitted to the HSE. If in doubt contact the H&S Team healthandsafety@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Q1.12 If a member of my team is self-isolating how do they record this?

There are now new absence and sickness reasons available in SAP to record COVID-19 related absence. On the **first day** of absence, staff must notify their line manager/Headteacher in accordance with normal absence reporting processes.

Schools will record the staff member's absence according to this new guidance:

Staff who have symptoms, i.e.

- a high temperature (i.e. 37.8 degrees or higher / they feel hot to touch on their chest or back)
- a new, continuous cough (this means they've started coughing repeatedly)
- loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

should not attend the school setting and must self-isolate for 10 days whether they live alone, or with others. This sickness absence should be recorded for the duration that they are sick by selecting the absence reason from the drop-down menu as: **COVID19 and sick pay will apply**. If the sickness ends before the 10-day isolation period ends, the remainder of the period should be recorded as Isolation working or non-working as appropriate.

If their symptoms do not get better after ten days, they should contact [NHS111 Online](#) for further advice.

- Staff who have symptoms but are well enough to work and **are** able to work from home, should do so. Even though staff will be working, they must still inform the school who must update SAP, selecting the reason from the drop-down menu as: **Isolation-working**.
- Staff who have symptoms, but are well enough to work, and **not able** to work from home due to the nature of their role, or because they do not have the necessary remote access available should isolate. They must inform the school who must update SAP, selecting the reason from the drop-down menu as: **Isolation-nonworking**.

Where staff are isolated, but well enough to work, (dependent upon nature of their role), normal pay will apply. In all situations, staff are expected to stay in regular contact with their line manager/Headteacher.

If you are unclear whether you need to self-isolate, please refer to this [NHS Link](#) for more information.

Q1.13 A member of my team has completed their period of self-isolation after having had COVID-19 symptoms or having had COVID-19. Are they now required to return to work?

Yes, an individual who has completed the full isolation period due to their own symptoms should be available to return to their education setting as required, provided they do not display COVID-19 symptoms. Staff who return to work can be at school or working from home, dependent upon local need, although appropriate support for their return needs to be in place.

Please refer to the Government guidance-[here](#).

Q1.14 If a pregnant employee is off with COVID19 related illness, should they start their maternity leave earlier than 4 weeks before the due date?

No – a pregnant employee’s maternity leave would only start early if their absence within 4 weeks of their due date is wholly or partly due to their pregnancy or childbirth. If they are not ill but self-isolating, their absence should be recorded as ‘Isolation-working’ or ‘Isolation-nonworking’.

Q1.15 I have a member of staff who is pregnant but not displaying any Covid-19 symptoms. Can I ask them to work in the education setting?

As per the guidance issued by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), it is advised that such staff take extra care in observing social distancing. It is advisable that before returning to school setting, every pregnant worker should have a risk assessment completed with their manager, which may involve occupational health. Please contact EPS if you are unsure.

There is no evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get seriously ill from coronavirus, but pregnant women have been included in the list of people at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) as a precaution. The government guidance for the clinically vulnerable remains in place and you should ensure you continue to follow the latest government guidance.

Pregnant women should follow the latest government guidance on staying alert and safe (social distancing) and avoid anyone who has symptoms suggestive of coronavirus.

If you are in your third trimester (more than 28 weeks’ pregnant) you should be particularly attentive to social distancing.

For more information: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>

Q1.16 I have staff who are in the clinically vulnerable category (i.e. not shielded group) and do not wish to return to school as they are nervous of coming in contact with Covid-19. What should I do?

Clinically vulnerable staff who are potentially at higher risk of Covid-19 are advised to take extra care if they cannot work from home. This includes pregnant women.

Please ensure the employee is aware of the measures that are in place to support their health and safety at work. As their manager, you must conduct a thorough risk assessment with staff who fall in the clinically vulnerable category if you have not done so recently, to determine their suitability to return to school as well as explore alternative duties they could do, that could be considered less riskier option. Provide a copy of the risk assessment so that the member of staff can understand the risks and what is being done by the education setting to reduce those risks. Guidance to support you in what you need to do to prepare can be found here: [OCC Intranet page for schools reopening](#).

You must regularly review the risk assessment to establish any change in the staff’s health condition, role or responsibilities and keep the communication channel open with that member of staff to ensure they feel secure to work in the education settings.

If you have a staff member who refuses to attend the education setting even after the risk assessment being conducted, appropriate PPE offered for COVID secure working, you must contact EPS for further advise and guidance.

Q1.17 Is there a specific guidance for schools in relation to risk assessments for BAME staff and their return to school setting?

Emerging evidence that is currently being reviewed by Public Health England shows that Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) communities may be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. This evidence

suggests that the impact may also be higher among men and those in the higher age brackets. The reasons for this are not yet fully understood.

It is recommended that line managers should have thorough, sensitive and comprehensive conversations with their BAME staff to identify if the BAME staff has any existing underlying health conditions that may increase the risks for them to undertake their frontline roles, in any capacity. Most importantly, the conversations should also, on an ongoing basis, consider the feelings of BAME colleagues, particularly with regard to their safety and their mental health. Managers should carry out an individual risk assessment to determine if it is safe for them to continue doing their main role or if any alterations could be made to their duties.

Q1.18 A staff member is neither self-isolating nor displaying symptoms, but has told me they are worried and don't want to return back to school, what should I do?

It is understandable that some staff may feel anxious and may value the opportunity for discussion and reassurance. Please ensure that the member of staff is aware of the measures that have been put in place in the education setting to support their health and safety at work. Managers should conduct a thorough risk assessment with that member of staff to establish any potential risks and how can this be mitigated.

If there is refusal to carry out certain duties, managers should ascertain what the concerns are, consider what, if anything, can be reasonably done to address those concerns and act accordingly, to encourage the individual to return to school. Managers may wish to seek advice from Occupational Health where necessary to explore if there are any underlying health conditions that may trigger anxiety or nervousness to return. If the individual still refuses to attend or perform the task despite appropriate measures taken by school management for their safer return and it being a reasonable management instruction, then manager should seek further advice and guidance from EPS-eps.consultants@hants.gov.uk.

Q1.19 There is a lot of information about how to record staff absence and staff are not clear how to record this?

The member of staff should contact their manager/headteacher in the normal way and then follow the guidance below.

Self-isolation applies when the member of staff or someone in their household has symptoms of coronavirus or have been advised to shield as they live in Tier 4 and are in the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable category. If they can continue to work from home, the school administrator should record the absence as isolation-working via the IBC Portal or SAP. The member of staff should provide the letter they received from their doctor / govt if they have been advised to shield.

If the staff member is unable to continue to work from home the office administrator should record the absence as isolation-nonworking via the IBC Portal or SAP.

If a member of staff is absent for any other reason, they should notify their headteacher/manager and the absence should be recorded in the normal way.

Here is the [link to the government advice to self-isolation](#), and information about [ending isolation](#).

| Situation | What to record in IBC? school admin office to input | Type of Pay received |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Individual is sick and unable to work | | |

| Situation | What to record in IBC? school admin office to input | Type of Pay received |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Sick with Covid-19 symptoms and unable to work | Sickness - select 'Covid-19' as the absence reason | Sick pay |
| Sick with other symptoms (non Covid-19) and unable to work | Sickness - select the appropriate absence reason | Sick pay |
| Individual has Covid-19 symptoms, is living with someone who has symptoms | | |
| Has mild Covid-19 symptoms or living with someone who is sick or displaying symptoms (required to self-isolate) and is able to work from home | Absence – select 'Isolation-working' absence type | Normal pay |
| Has mild Covid-19 symptoms or living with someone who is sick or displaying symptoms (required to self-isolate) but is unable to work from home (due to technology or role restrictions) | Absence – select 'Isolation-nonworking' absence type | Normal pay |

1.20 I have a member of staff who has returned from a holiday abroad and as per the government's guidelines on quarantine requirements, has to self-isolate for two weeks following their return and therefore cannot return to school at start of the new term? What should I do?

You will need to discuss the implications of this with your member of staff to determine whether they were aware of the quarantine requirements prior to going on holiday abroad.

If the staff member was on a holiday after the latest UK government quarantine restrictions were put in place knowing that they would have to quarantine for 10 days on their return and that this will prevent them from returning to work at the beginning of term, then this will result in unpaid leave being granted.

If the staff member was already on holiday when the latest UK government quarantine restrictions were put in place, then you may wish to record their absence as 'isolation working (if they are able to work from home) and isolation-non working (if you cannot assign them any work that can be done from home).

Every situation will be different, so where home working is not possible, consideration will be given to using a combination of some or all of the different types of leave options and giving sympathetic consideration to certain circumstances which could include:

- extenuating circumstances such as a family funeral abroad
- pre-booked holidays that cannot be cancelled without incurring financial cost (i.e. insurers will not reimburse cost) that were arranged before quarantine could have been envisaged
- pre-booked holidays the tour operator has not cancelled but has instead rescheduled on fixed dates which, if cancelled by the customer, would be at financial cost to them

1.21 A member of staff's household has travelled abroad recently and needs to quarantine now as per the latest UK government guidelines. Does my staff member also need to quarantine?

No, this won't be necessary if they haven't travelled with them. However, please remind your staff member that they should avoid contact with the household members and where possible, minimise the time they spend in shared spaces, like kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas.

It is important to avoid contact with other people in the same household in order to reduce the risk of transmitting coronavirus. The staff member should stay in a well-ventilated room with a window to the outside that can be opened, separate from other people in their home.

If possible, they should use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household. If they have to share these facilities, regular cleaning will be required after each person has used them. Such staff should ensure to maintain good hygiene around themselves. ***If, however, the staff member displays symptoms of Covid-19 or has been tested positive, they must notify the school immediately and self-isolate as per the Government guidelines.***

Q1.22 I don't have any childcare and/or my child's school has closed due to a positive COVID-19 case. However, I have been told to return to work. What are my options?

It is important you discuss this with your line manager so s/he can understand your caring responsibilities. Together you will need to consider a number of factors including:

- Can you work from home?
- Can other members of your household provide childcare?
- Could you reduce your contracted hours temporarily?
- Could you take a period of unpaid leave or parental leave?
- Is there other work that you could do that fits with your caring responsibilities?

Both your personal responsibilities and service needs will need to be taken into account when considering and agreeing with your manager the options that may be appropriate to your circumstances. It is essential the council is able to maintain services, within the available budget, and if you are unable to carry out your role, your pay may need to be adjusted to ensure that funding is available to make any necessary interim arrangements during your absence.

Q1.23 What do managers need to do if they have a case of coronavirus COVID-19 in their service among our staff?

Please refer to this link-<http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/schoolsnews/updated-flow-chart-and-resource-pack> for guidance.

Section 2. Health & Safety, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Q2.1 What is the guidance around PPE that we will need to consider for safer return of staff and more pupils when schools re-open for wider range of pupil groups?

Please refer to the national PPE Guidance [here](#)

According to this guidance, majority of staff in education settings will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work, even if they are not always able to maintain a distance of 2 meters from others. PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases including:

- children, young people and students whose care routinely already involves the use of PPE due to their intimate care needs should continue to receive their care in the same way
- if a child, young person or other learner becomes unwell with symptoms of coronavirus while in their setting and needs direct personal care until they can return home, a fluid-resistant surgical face mask should be worn by the supervising adult if 2 metres cannot be maintained. If contact with the child or young person is necessary, then disposable gloves, a disposable apron and a fluid-resistant surgical face mask should be worn by the supervising adult. If a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of

splashing to the eyes, for example from coughing, spitting, or vomiting, then eye protection should also be worn.

Q2.2 What about precautions when providing care for children and young people - those who are vulnerable (including those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan)?

Schools will need to carry out a specific risk assessment and further guidance can be found at: [Government website](#).

Q2.3 My team has asked about ordering hand gel for desks etc. Should I be doing this?

National advice is that everyone should be practising good hand hygiene, and to follow the 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' guidance, particularly if individuals have a cough or cold. The best defence against COVID-19 and other germs is to regularly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains **at least 60% alcohol** should be used.

Q2.4 Is there any particular advice about cleaning educational settings?

See guidance issued by Public Health England: [here](#)

2.5 Can I get help with undertaking a risk assessment?

It is important managers carry out a risk assessment to ensure measures are in place to protect people's health and safety and prevent the spread of coronavirus. If you require assistance or advice in undertaking this please contact the Schools H&S Team at healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Q2.6 Is it ok that we are sharing workspaces, e.g. sharing a desk for PPA time?

Sharing desks should be avoided. If sharing workspaces, the user should ensure they wash their hands regularly with soap and water and use antivirus wipes to clean any workstation they are using (including keyboard, telephone and desk surface) at each sitting/session.

Q2.7 What should schools do to help reduce the risk of infection for visitors, contractors and peripatetic teachers?

The advice being given to our staff also applies to all visitors at our sites, i.e. follow social distancing guidelines and maintain good hygiene practices. Visitors will be expected to comply with the school risk assessment. Visitors should be kept to a minimum where possible and further advice can be found in the full on this link-[Guidance for full opening: schools](#)

Q2.8 I've been contacted by NHS to say I have been in contact with someone who has tested positive with corona virus, do I need to provide proof to my manager?

You should follow the test and trace guidance detailed [here](#). If you need to self-isolate, you should contact your line manager and record your absence via Employee Self Service selecting either isolation working or isolation non-working options. Any additional absence will need to be covered by a Fit Note from your GP. COVID-19 related absences should be recorded via Employee Self Service selecting the COVID- 19 sickness absence option.

If you are absent for any other reason, you should notify your manager and record your absence in the normal way.

Q2.9 I have returned to work but have been contacted by NHS again to say that I have been in contact with someone else who has tested positive, do I still need to go into isolation?

Yes, you do, and the same rules apply as the first time you self-isolated. This [link](#) provides further details.

Q2.10 What should I do if someone becomes unwell at work?

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace with coronavirus symptoms, in line with national advice, the unwell person should go home as soon as possible and self-isolate, recording their absence. Necessary actions must be taken including cleaning and track and trace.

Section 3: Working from home

Q3.1 Should it now be routine practice that if staff have a device (e.g. laptop), that they take it home at the end of each day in case they need to self-isolate?

As a general rule, if staff have a device, it would be advisable to do so. All Headteachers will have been considering business continuity to ensure sufficient education provision can be sustained and home working can be implemented where necessary.

Q3.2 If staff take their device home, will they need to insure it themselves?

No, however, any member of staff taking a device home must ensure it is kept safe. This means not leaving it unattended anywhere except in your own home where you will be taking the same measures you would normally do to keep your property and data secure, including password protection and encryption as far as possible.

Q3.3 If staff are working from home, should the school refund expense (e.g. telephone, broadband, heating, electricity)? Can staff claim tax relief in relation to home working?

Staff will continue to receive pay as normal if they are working from home. No additional payment can be made as a consequence of working from home.

Please refer to the website on claiming tax relief: [Government tax relief website](#).

How to claim the tax relief (Where OCC is the employer)

If you normally do a self-assessment form, you can claim on it. If not, then simply fill in an [online P87 form](#) through your Government Gateway account or by filling out a [postal P87 form](#).

You'll be asked for your:

- Employer's name: Oxfordshire County Council
- PAYE reference: 075/A9000
- Job title:

For postal P87s, you'll also need your national insurance number.

The key section to complete is titled 'Using your home as an office'.

Note: You do not need to wait until the end of the tax year to claim this year's working from home allowance. For this year only you can claim a whole year's entitlement regardless of how long you have actually worked from home – full details are available on the [website](#).

Q3.4 Will I receive a payment towards my utility bills if I work from home?

No – working from home is for mutual benefit. You will be saving on travel expenditure and travel time to and from work.

Q3.5 I am over the age of 70 but am in good health, can I still come into work?

In line with government guidance, if you are well and able to work, you should do so.

Section 4: Furlough

4.1 As schools have opened for all pupils from September 2020, it is expected that those staff who were furloughed will be returning to work from the beginning of the term.

However, there may be some schools where staff have continued to be furloughed. Where staff have continued to be furloughed or have been furloughed on part-time basis, the extension to the furlough scheme till **April 2021** means that these staff can continue to be furloughed if needed.

The Scheme is also open to staff who may not have been furloughed previously, however the criteria remains the same, furlough can only be offered to staff whose salary is funded by private income such as fees paid by parents. The staff must have been registered on the payroll on or before 30 October 2020 to be eligible.

[More information is available on this link- Furlough.](#)

The Flexible furlough scheme will continue and where staff are brought back in on a part time basis, the school will need to monitor the hours worked by these staff so that they can be entered into the portal.

Note: All furlough absences for November must be entered in IBC portal by 30th November.

4.2 We have noticed that demand for our breakfast and after school clubs has reduced what options are available for us to manage this?

The furlough scheme has been extended until the end of April 2021, so you can make use of this scheme until the extension end date. After this time, if services do not resume to their full potential, it is possible that you may not have sufficient work for some or all your staff. You are reminded that until any formal decisions are made the following will apply for all contracted staff:

- Employees will continue to be paid and receive all of their pay and entitled benefits as per their terms and conditions of employment;
- The school will be financially responsible for all the staffing costs, with no further recourse to government funding;
- You will need to discuss the school's next steps with EPS which could potentially include:
 - reducing hours of all affected staff or applying a rota so that all staff can remain in work on less hours;
 - looking for alternative roles or responsibilities – could a little training help them adapt to a different role?

4.3 Will teachers and other school staff, be entitled to sick pay for an absence caused by coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Absence due to COVID-19 will not be counted as a trigger in the absence management process. However, the rules around sick pay continue to be as standard, irrespective of whether the teacher or staff member has been off sick due to COVID-19 or any other sickness.

4.4 Should appraisals and performance management processes continue for teachers during this period?

Yes, according to the government guidance, LA maintained schools must continue to adhere to the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), which includes the requirement to ensure that all pay progression for teachers is linked to performance management. However, we would expect schools to use their discretion and take pragmatic steps, consistent with the Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2012 to adapt performance management and appraisal arrangements to take account of the current circumstances e.g. by basing performance on the period schools were open, adjusting, if necessary, for expected trajectory had there been no closures.

4.5 Should appraisals and performance management processes for support staff continue during this period?

Appraisals and performance management for support staff should be carried out in accordance with the employee's contract of employment and proceed as normal where possible.

Section 5: Returning to work following non-COVID 19 related absence

Q5.1 A member of staff is due to return to work from maternity leave. How should we manage this?

The maternity leave of such staff will end in the normal way and they will move back to normal pay. Please ensure their IBC records are duly updated to reflect their return to work. The school will then need to engage with the member of staff regarding expectations in respect of work dependent upon the provision being provided by the school.

Q5.2 A member of staff who has been off sick is due to return to work. How should we manage this?

If the staff member has been declared medically fit for work, the individual will move back to normal pay. The school will then need to engage with the member of staff regarding expectations in respect of work dependent upon the provision being provided by the school. Please ensure that the sickness record of the member of staff is updated on IBC.

Link to managing sickness absence policy from schools intranet can be found [here](#).

Section 6: Restructuring and TUPE

Q6.1 The school is part way through a restructuring process – can this continue?

EPS case worker will be reviewing any current or scheduled restructuring / TUPE activities with the relevant Head Teacher and the recognised Union representatives and take a decision on case by case basis. The School Head Teacher / Chair of Governors should therefore engage with the EPS caseworker supporting their restructure / TUPE, who will discuss the school's individual needs and explore the practical measures of proceeding / delaying any restructuring / TUPE activities.

Q6.2 Will normal EPS support be available?

Education Personnel Services continues to operate its normal advice and casework support services with normal service opening times, although with immediate effect this will be through eps.consultants@hants.gov.uk.

If you need to speak to an adviser, please email the team, leaving a telephone number and an Advisor will call you back.

Section 7 Supporting Mental Health and Well-Being

Q7.1 Is there any wellbeing support I can direct staff to?

You will need explore what options or services are available through your school. If your school has access to dedicated Employee Assistance Programme or through school Insurance services, then how to access this, should be made available to staff. **OCC have a new EAP provider- VITA Wellbeing.**

- Online: www.my-eap.com username: vitawellbeing
- Tel: 0800 111 6387
- For manager support: 0800 111 6385 (9am – 6pm Mon – Fri)

Useful links on wellbeing to refer to-

[Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)- Link from Government website

[Managing mental health during coronavirus outbreak](#)-Link from Mental Health UK

Accessing care and support

It is important that you continue to receive the care and support you need to help you stay safe and well.

It is also really important to look after your mental health. The [Every Mind Matters](#) website offers advice and practical steps that you can take to support your wellbeing and manage your mental health during this pandemic. If you, or someone you care for, are experiencing a mental health crisis, we urge you to make contact with a local health professional immediately.

Q7.2 Is there guidance and support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing?

Yes, additional guidance on supporting children's health and wellbeing has been published by the DFE and can be found [here](#):

Section 8: Data protection and coronavirus: what you need to know

The Information Commission Office recognises the unprecedented challenges we are all facing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and has provided additional guidelines as follows:

We know you might need to share information quickly or adapt the way you work. Data protection will not stop you doing that. It's about being proportionate - if something feels excessive from the public's point of view, then it probably is.

8.1 Can I tell my staff that a colleague may have potentially contracted COVID-19?

Yes. You should keep staff informed about cases in your education setting. Remember, you probably don't need to name individuals and you shouldn't provide more information than necessary. You have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of your employees, as well as a duty of care. Data protection doesn't prevent you doing this.

Where staff have been in contact with another member of staff who has been tested positive for COVID-19, then they must immediately notify the Head Teacher and get themselves tested immediately whilst self-isolating as per the Government's guidelines.

8.2 Can I collect health data in relation to COVID-19 about employees or from visitors to my organisation?

You have an obligation to protect your employees' health, but that doesn't necessarily mean you need to gather lots of information about them.

8.3 Can I share employees' health information to authorities for public health purposes?

Yes. It's unlikely we will have to share information with authorities about specific individuals, but if it is necessary then data protection law won't stop you from doing so.

8.4 How should I destroy/secure personal or sensitive information while working at home?

From a GDPR perspective, anything containing personal or sensitive information should not be disposed of at home unless it can be guaranteed to be cross shredded. If that is not possible, it should be kept in a secure and locked location until it can be brought back into the office to be disposed of securely.

8.5 What guidance has government, or the regulator provided for data protection during Coronavirus?

The Information Commissioner's Office and the Department of Health and Social Care have both provided notices and guidance on information sharing and confidential data for Covid19 response. Please read this [briefing note on how to handle sensitive data \(pdf format,63Kb\)](#).

8.6 Do I need to worry about where data is coming from or going to?

With all the information and requests and offers there is lots of information coming in to and going out from the organisation. It is essential that you record where you receive new data from, and where you

share new data to, so that we can trace that data, and return or delete data when the response and recovery phases conclude.

8.7 Do we need to tell our customers, clients and public that we might be processing data differently for the while?

It is important to continue to be clear, honest and transparent about how we use data, where it goes and who sees it. We have a special Covid19 Privacy Notice published on our public website, and you should signpost people to it just as we normally do to our standard Council Privacy Notice.

Section 9: Recruitment

Q9.1 Can I still recruit new staff for the new term?

We are seeing unprecedented times, there are many things to consider in this ever-changing situation. It's important to try and be as flexible as we can, while maintaining safeguarding standards to ensure we can still carry out the work that needs to happen whilst all of this is going on. Continuing with recruitment should, therefore, be determined on a case by case basis, taking into account your school's need and capacity, particularly in the current circumstances.

You will need to think about your ability to conduct objective interviews and schools should have proper consideration to how individuals can be appropriately inducted and effectively deployed in the current working environment.

Q9.2 What should we do if we have new starters in the next few weeks?

This will depend on the work the new starter will be carrying out and if they are well, they might have childcare responsibilities or carer responsibilities that prevent them from starting as planned, it's important to keep in touch with them regularly and be as flexible as you can, reassure them that they will not be forgotten about and keep them up to date with your plans.

For those that are in self-isolation you may want to go through the induction process via skype video / Microsoft Teams and send materials over via email.

Q9.3 If I am recruiting to a permanent post, do I still have to follow Safer Recruitment processes at this time?

Yes, schools must continue to follow all safer recruitment processes, including, as appropriate, relevant sections in part 3 of KCSIE thereby ensuring people who are unsuitable are not able to enter the workforce or gain access to children.

Schools should also note there has been a temporary change to the DBS guidance on standard and enhanced DBS ID checking to minimise the need for face-to-face contact in urgent cases. ID documents can now be viewed over video link and scanned images can be used in advance of the DBS check being submitted. However, the applicant must present the original versions of their documents when they start their employment. Further information is available at www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-dbs-id-checking-guidelines.

Q9.4 What will happen about performance management for autumn?

It is anticipated that normal performance management processes and associated pay progression will apply in autumn, with schools utilising information on the period of time that individuals have been in school to make determinations regarding performance ratings and pay progression. Further detail will be confirmed in due course if this position changes.

Useful links for Education settings-

[OCC Schools' intranet](#)

[Latest DfE guidance](#)

Latest guidance issued in December 2020-

- an updated [handbook on asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#). This handbook sets out the plans to begin rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) testing of staff, pupils and students, in secondary schools and colleges from January 2021 to identify asymptomatic cases
- guidance on [asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#) which provides information for schools and colleges about how they can start to test pupils and students from January
- guidance on what [schools and childcare providers](#) need to do at the start of the spring term, including information on the return of schools with secondary-age pupils and asymptomatic testing for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- guidance to help [further education providers](#) put in place testing to ensure education resumes in January 2021
- a [letter template](#) providing schools with suggested text that they can use to inform parents about testing and how it works to ensure they are able to make informed consent
- A [consent template](#) to sit alongside the letter template for schools to issue to parents to provide their consent for their child (under 16) to participate in testing